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ABSTRACT

A project was conducted to help adult educators in graduate education courses to examine their notions of adult learning, to be lifelong learners, and to engage in self-directed learning. The course was conducted in small self-formed learning groups, and 19 adult learners were observed from various perspectives: through a survey measuring the adult students' awareness of adult learning characteristics, through open-ended surveys, and through observations of the students' interactions with each other and their reflections on their own learning. The study found that the adult students had little knowledge of any of the four dimensions of adult learning. Many students were apprehensive about group work but actually found it helpful and meaningful. At the end of the class, all students produced a school personnel manual (the object of the course). The most successful students had fully integrated their learning and produced a manual that was useful to them and that reflected their beliefs. They also asserted that they had learned a surprisingly large amount from their classmates and the group work--and that experience would be reflected in their future work. (The open-ended survey and a follow-up interview are included in the report. Contains 42 references.) (KC)

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No Longer "Neglected": Adult Learners in Graduate Education Programs

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, November, 1993

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No Longer "Neglected": Adult Learners in Graduate Education Programs

Ramona Moore & Ira Bogotch

Introduction

Within education, administration is about adult behaviors. Yet, neither adult learning theories nor adult environments are made explicit in the content or learning processes in teaching educational administration [EDAD]. In response to the question of "How do school administrators learn?" we read, "In the absence of research on this question, let us assume that school administrators learn pretty much the same way the other adults learn" (Hawley, 1989, p. 10). Hawley continues: "The importance of focusing greater attention on the way school administrators learn seems critical. How can we expect to develop curriculum without understanding the social, organizational, and cognitive factors that influence how the curriculum will be learned?" (p. 11). The arguments favoring the explicit inclusion of adult learning theory in EDAD revolve on two axes: (1) within a professional education school context, non-traditional students are adults, and in particular, adults in mid-careers; and, (2) within the field of educational administration, EDAD students aspire to positions in which they will interact and lead other adults.

To most observers, what educational administrators need to know, i.e., the content, remains apart from the question of how administrators [or aspiring administrators] learn. Traditionally, EDAD content, i.e., its knowledge base, is derived

from four sources: theories, experiences, task areas, and roles (Daresh, 1992). This conception of content, however, needs to be developed further by combining it with curricular and adult pedagogical theory. In terms of curricular content, Veatch and Miel (1961) found that content has four distinct dimensions: (1) interrelated information, (2) skills to secure the information so as to solve problems, (3) good feelings toward self and others so as to appreciate the information, and (4) different modes of experiencing information [e.g., analytically, experimentally, intuitively, creatively, etc.]. If, in addition, we added two of the assumptions of adult learning theory, first, that new knowledge be constructed from previous experiences and prior knowledge, and, second, that the new knowledge be applied immediately to new contexts, then inquiry into content and learning would be seen as two sides of the same coin (Petrie, 1981). A shift in emphasis to student control over information processing and the affective caring about what is being learned would reveal differences in EDAD learning behaviors, such as students who do assignments for the instructor from those who do assignments for their own professional development.

<u>The Adult Learner and Adult Learning Theories</u>

Who is an adult learner? Knowles (1970; 1990) explained that a person is an "adult" to the extent that he or she is performing social roles typically assigned by our culture to those it considers adults and to the extent that the individual perceives him or herself to be essentially responsible for his or

her life. According to Neimi (1985), the adult learner is one who returns to study, on a full-time or part-time basis, after a period of time spent in other pursuits and who brings to new learning a rich background of life and work experience -- sophisticated insights springing from his or her knowledge of the world of work, from the skills acquired there, and from the relationships developed with other people at work and in personal lives. Freedman (1985) states that the adult learner is someone who is motivated enough to want to gain further education at the end of a working day or is required to come to a program for certification.

Modern adult learning theory has its foundations in the following assumptions of Lindeman (1926):

1. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy.
2. Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered.
3. Experience is the richest source for adults' learning.
4. Adults have a deep need to be self-directing.
5. Individual differences among people increase with age.

The implications of these assumptions are that learning should be based on people's experiences and focused on life situations. Instruction should emphasize the analysis of experiences, and the role of the instructor should be that of an "engager" rather than a "transmitter." Teaching strategies should take into account differences in style, time, place, and pace (Knowles, 1990, p. 31).

The roots of adult learning theories can be traced to the research in group dynamics approaches in the late 1940s and 1950s. According to the laboratory education theory, the adult learner mobilized a set of motivational, perceptual, emotional, and attitudinal systems to resist learning and changing unless the climate was safe to do so. Proponents of this theory looked upon learning as a process of changing (Bradford, 1958; Bradford, Gibb, & Benne, 1964; Stubblefield, 1983).

Knowles's theory of adult education (1970), andragogy, the "art and science of helping adults learn" (1980, p. 43), suggested that adults succeed in situations where they are highly motivated, where they can participate in the learning process, and where learning content had practical applications. In addition, he also stated that adults find an informal setting conducive to learning, and they want exact details of what is expected of them, opportunities to practice their newly learned skills, and immediate feedback on their learning progress. Knowles asserted that learners are themselves important resources for learning; activating and incorporating their rich backgrounds of life experiences, goals, and motivation into the methods and techniques being used makes the learning process more relevant (1980). Therefore, the education of adult learners has to go beyond the "transmission of knowledge to helping persons gain competency in directing and managing their own learning" (Stubblefield, 1983, p. 147). It should also include a psychological climate favorable to learning, "which causes adults

to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers; in which there is a freedom of expression without fear of punishment or ridicule." (Knowles, 1980, p. 47).

Shortly after Knowles' theory of andragogy appeared, Allen Tough (1971) reported the results of seven years of work on the deliberated efforts of adults "to learn, change, and grow" (p. vii). Tough's research was concerned not only with what and why adults learn, but also with how they learn and what help they obtain for learning. He found that adults organized their learning efforts around "projects...defined as a series of related episodes, adding up to at least seven hours. In each episode more than half of the person's total motivation is to gain and retain certain fairly clear knowledge and skill, or to produce some other lasting change in himself" (Tough, 1979, p. 1). Tough concluded that adult learners proceed through several phases in the process of engaging in a learning project. He speculated that helping them gain increased competence in dealing with each phase with decreasing amount of assistance might be one of the most effective ways of improving their learning effectiveness. Stubblefield (1983) viewed Tough's research as an empirical base for learning as a self-help process.

Mezirow's perspective transformation (1978) centered around his work with community college re-entry programs for women. He described what the women experienced as a unique kind of learning: Learning the psychological and cultural assumptions

that influenced how they saw themselves and their relationships. Later, Mezirow (1981) grounded his observations in the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas (1970, 1971), who had described three areas in which people sought knowledge. Mezirow translated these three areas (i.e, work, relationships, and emancipatory action) into domains of adult learning, each with "its own interpretive categories, ways of assessing knowledge claims, methods of inquiry and, by implication, each with its own distinctive models and needs" (1981, p. 3). Habermas' domain of emancipatory action, the uniquely adult domain of learning, is what Mezirow means by perspective transformation. According to this theory, the basic task for adult educators is helping people become aware of the psychocultural assumptions that have shaped how they see themselves and others and how they can reconstitute this structure so that they can recognize and deal with these "culturally induced dependency roles and relationships" (p. 7).

While the theories on adult learning have evolved from the particular situations and interests of the researchers, Stubblefield (1983) identified the following as appositional themes: The learner not the teacher; learning not education; process not content. In developing college courses based on what is known about adult learning, Brookfield (1987) suggested the following as six principles of effective practice in facilitating learning: (1) voluntary participation in learning; (2) mutual respect; (3) collaborative spirit; (4) action and reflection; (5) critical reflection; and (6) self-direction. Because we have

little data on adult learning (Knowles, 1970, 1980, 1990), Delamont suggests that we "...make the familiar "bizarre, unusual, and novel" by studying the "unusual, bizarre, or different classrooms such as those for adults" (1992, p. 45).

EDAD and Adult Learning Theories

How and where do adult learning theories fit into educational administration programs? The relationship between educational administration and adult learning is real, natural, and necessary, not an artificially created construct. By accepting a "cultural perspective" (Evers & Lakomski, 1991) based on building interpretive-relationships within a professional school setting, the necessity of adult learning theory emerges.

Proponents of a cultural organizational perspective claim that if we want to understand and improve our educational organizations, then we must study their culture -- i.e., the languages, beliefs, myths, metaphors, and rituals. Whereas the more traditional scientific and logical empiricism tend to look "outwards," the emphasis of interpretive social sciences is on looking "inwards" -- i.e., to be concerned with human motivation, intention, and beliefs -- in short, with human subjectivity and the creation of meaning (Greenfield, 1975).

Culture, "a system by which people structure their experiences and make meaning out of life around them" (White, 1989, p. 33), is the "social and normative glue that holds an organization together.... It expresses the values or social ideals and beliefs that organization members come to share"

(Smirich, 1983, p. 344); it provides identity, engenders commitment which goes beyond self-interest, contributes to system stability, and functions as a sense-making device (Smirich, 1983). According to Smirich, leadership is about "the management of meaning and the shaping of interpretations" (1983, p. 351), a conception of leadership echoed by Bennis and Nanus (1985).

But like all theory, adult learning theory must be learnable. So, what accounts for the necessary relationship between a cultural organizational perspective and adult learning theory is that it permits adults to share their own meanings derived from previous experiences and prior knowledge, and also create new meanings based on self-directedness and internal needs. Cultural perspectives of organizational theory incorporates the extra-empirical interpretations and feelings. An adult has no choice but to develop a theory of practice based on his or her own interpretations, no matter how narrowly or broadly conceived. To do otherwise is unnatural and false; whatever comfort may be derived from rational, linear, or scientific accommodations, the feelings are shortlived and unsatisfying when confronted by crisis, irrational decision-making, and wrongheaded policy. The consequences of ignoring adult learning theory is that EDAD content remains abstract, distinct from personal adult constructions in practice.

Cultural leaders are like good educators: they "relinquish their exclusive control over the learning situation and encourage the learner's autonomy" (Rosenblum, 1985). Successful

leaders/educators are those who learn from their students/followers and who help students/followers to take responsibility (Freedman, 1985). The "real value of leadership rests with the meanings which actions import to others than in the actions themselves" (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984 cited in Evers & Lakomski, p. 126). As such, there is not one theory or method that explains how successful leadership/education occurs. "If concepts, theories, and the questions that different theories suggest are important in shaping focus and explaining what one sees, then using different concepts and theories is important for revealing the richness of social phenomena" (Eisner, 1991, p. 229). What we conclude is that both a "cultural perspective" and an "adult perspective" are involved in administrative practice.

The Adult Learning Story

Our story about adult learners in graduate education programs began two years ago. This episode started to unfold on June 15, 1993, when twenty-one adults gathered at noon in a small, windowless 12 x 25 foot gray room for EDAD 6820, a course titled, The Administration of School Personnel. The professor had arranged the desks in an ellipse because the shape of the room precluded a circle. He began, "This is an adult class. We're all adults, and this course is about dealing with the adults who work in schools. When I was designing this course, I had a model in my mind about students and real graduate school experiences.

"We're going to set up groups, talk to one another without

using our 'teacher voices,' and listen to a few experts (e.g., a personnel supervisor from one of the local school districts and a female superintendent of a large local school district). But mostly we're going to learn from each other and with each other. Maybe collectively we can figure out how we can help to make schools better."

The professor's opening remarks shifted to conditions cited by teachers who describe their schools as being "good schools" (Barth, 1991): (1) Colleagues respect one another; (2) Teachers care about children and other individuals; and (3) Teachers are proud of the school in which they work. Using these conditions as a springboard, the professor said, "Tell us about yourself and your school." One by one, the adults began to talk. One teacher was looking for another job; student enrollment at her school had decreased and she was a victim of "RIF" (i.e., reduction in force). Two students were getting married during the semester; one student was a principal at a middle school. Three students had just been appointed to new positions: a principalship, an assistant principalship, and a coordinator. One student was a union representative; another was a guidance counselor and a "sometime principal when the real principal was away." One student had grown up "on the bayou" and told about "the good ole boy network" that existed in his parish. One student was preparing for her master's comprehensives, and another was preparing for motherhood. A business administration student said that she felt a little out of place because she was the only

student in the class who was not in education; she had scheduled the course as an elective. Everyone else had enrolled in the course because it is required for certification in educational administration.

What started out as individual sharing about schools and school personnel became a conversation -- a dialogue -- about adult issues (e.g. finding another job, getting married, planning to have a baby, etc.). As the clock drew nearer to 2:45 pm, the predetermined time for class to end, more and more of the adults began to eye the stack of course syllabi that was still sitting on the professor's desk. Gradually, the atmosphere in the small room shifted from interest in what was being shared by other students to what appeared to be apprehension, uncertainty, and confusion. One student who was sitting next to me whispered, "What do you think this class is really going to be like? What do you think he's going to make us do? I heard from people that he's calmed down. I couldn't believe that they were taking two courses last semester. I'm getting married in three weeks, and I have to know how to schedule my time. When do you think he's going to hand out the syllabus?"

Five minutes before the end of class, the professor hurriedly grabbed the stack of syllabi and gave the assignment: "Read the syllabus, make comments, and list questions that you might have about the course. Also, read the first core article: "Who should decide? The benefits of wide participation in school decision making" (Davies, 1992). While you are reading the core

articles, you should continually ask yourself, "How will personnel be affected?" The bell rang, and the twenty-one adults left the small gray room and became mothers, fathers, car poolers, summer camp directors, office workers, teachers, program coordinators.

When the adults gathered again, the dialogues and the personal sharings continued. After everyone had had a chance to tell about themselves, the professor began to talk about forming groups. He explained that one of the reasons we had shared information about our backgrounds was so that we might use this information in creating groups. "The choice will be up to you," he said. "You might want to create groups based on friendship, proximity to one another, past experiences, current employment, grade levels, whatever. You decide."

One student said, "I must be having brain block. Are we working on our manuals [i.e., a Personal Personnel Manual] within our groups?" The professor explained that there was no way that everyone could read all of the information and articles that were part of the ERIC bibliography that he had compiled on topics related to the administration of school personnel [e.g., recruitment, selection, induction, staff development, assessment, termination, mentoring, collective bargaining, interviewing, etc.]. "But," he continued, "it would be very easy to do this within a group. What I'm asking for is a developmental model of cooperative learning. I won't give group assignments or appoint a group leader." He explained that the structure of the end

product -- a personnel manual -- would be basically the same for everyone, but he was hoping that each student would "bring in your uniqueness and your school context" and create a "personal" personnel manual.

When the discussion about group functions and personnel manuals had subsided, the professor asked if people were ready to "take the big step" and form groups. Some of the adults were slow to move around; a few stayed in their desks and just scooted to the nearest group that seemed to be forming. Others, however, very deliberately sought out specific people. Five groups were formed, but the group sizes and makeups differed. [They would tell us later on an open-ended survey how they decided to group themselves.] Even though the professor had suggested that the groups begin to discuss one of the core readings, the conversations and the topics varied. The bell rang all too soon, and students complained that they hadn't even gotten phone numbers and names from everyone in their group.

At the next class meeting, we proposed our study on adult learning to the EDAD students and asked them to participate. First, we gave them the background of our research, which had included a series of studies conducted by EDAD faculty and students. The initial study had investigated initial learning dispositions of EDAD students and learning was changed during one semester of intervention (Bogotch & Piggott, 1992); the second study had used two intervention strategies [i.e., action research and coaching] to effect learning changes in teaching EDAD and in

learning (Bogotch & Bernard, 1994); the third study had been a retrospective analysis of EDAD learners which had identified six learning themes evident in EDAD students: structure, variety of instructional methods, group interactions, lenses to see more deeply, content and the reflection-on-content, and personal and professional recognition (Bogotch, Bernard, Moore, Brooks, & Piggott, 1993).

Because of these other studies, we [the professor/course instructor and I, a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction working towards certification in administration] wanted to investigate how adults -- especially aspiring administrators -- learn in a course that involves communities of learners and self-directedness. We told them about the purposes of the study, and we defined our objective as wanting to offer them a "real graduate school experience" (EDAD 6820 Course syllabus, 1993, p. 2). "I don't have any recipes to offer; but, I will offer this course as a proving ground for you to discover ways in which you can continue to learn on your own." (Syllabus)

Using overhead transparencies, we explained the rationale for the study as follows:

1. If we want to foster learning as a lifelong process, then we must be lifelong learners. Leaders begin this process of "innovative learning" by knowing themselves and the world around them (Bennis, 1989).
2. If we want to "improve schools from within," then we, as principals, must work together with teachers, staff

members, students, and parents to create a community of learners. "A major responsibility of adults in a community of learners is to actively engage in their own learning, to make their learning visible to youngsters and to other adults alike, to enjoy and celebrate this learning, and to sustain it over time even -- especially -- when swamped by the demands of others and by their work" (Barth, 1991, p. 162).

3. If we believe that "leaders consciously work to build unity, order, and meaning" out of everyday school life that includes different and competing opinions, options, and values about teaching and administering, then we must learn to become interpretive leaders, capable of finding meaning, reflecting, and "designing courses of actions aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones" (Sergiovanni, 1984).
4. If we are to develop an adult model of learning and leadership (recommended by Barth, 1991), then we must research how adults learn and lead. One conception of content specifically related to the preparation of principals, involving a continuous process of orientation-immersion-decision-development, was proposed by Donaldson (1991).

We explained the methodology that we would use to collect the data. The course instructor wanted to first offer them an alternative paradigm to understanding the topics generally taught

in the administration of school personnel. Because personnel textbooks focus on the personnel functions performed by a few administrators within a centralized bureaucracy, the instructor proposed a more active participatory model of doing personnel work, primarily at the school site level. The course was structured sequentially from hiring to firing.

At the same time, we wanted to collect data using participant observation, "which has a long history in social science research, especially in urban sociology and anthropology, but has not been widely used in educational policy and administration." (Delamont, 1992; p. 7) We wanted to use an open-ended survey that we had designed (see Appendix) and an inventory to examine their awareness of adult characteristics (e.g., the Rossman Adult Learning Inventory, Rossman, 1977, 1989). We also wanted to conduct follow-up interviews after the semester course was over. We stressed that we didn't want the EDAD students to be our "subjects;" we wanted them to be "joint inquirers." (Knowles, 1980). We told them that we wanted to share the data with them and we asked for their help in analyzing and interpreting what we were seeing and hearing about adults learning.

All of the adults (the nineteen students enrolled in the course, the doctoral student and the course instructor) agreed to participate in the study. We began the process of "adult watching" in a manner similar to Yetta Goodman's (1978) "kid watching." We informally observed the learning processes of

adults in an effort to develop an understanding of how adults learn and how we might use this knowledge to develop educational experiences with them. The doctoral student began the process of collecting data as an "adult watcher" and a participant observer using the ethnographic research method described by Spradley (1979) because the

> essential core of ethnography is this concern of meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these are directly expressed in language; others are communicated only indirectly through word and action (p. 5).

However, we did not work alone. Recognizing that this process involved taking extensive field notes of class activities, interactions, and dialogues, the adult learners often repeated their comments or asked, "Did you get that?"

Adult Watching and Reflecting

We conducted our process of "adult watching" from different perspectives. The first involved measuring EDAD students' awareness of adult learning characteristics using Rossman's (1990) inventory, a 44-item instrument divided into four dimensions (i.e., orientation to learning, mental abilities, physiological factors, and psychological factors). We selected this instrument for two reasons: (1) we wanted to know if students in graduate education courses are aware of adult learner characteristics, and (2) we wanted to better understand the implications these characteristics have for both teaching and learning. The second perspective asked students on an open-ended survey (See Appendix 1) to respond to class activities. Another perspective was our observations of adult students' behaviors,

their
interactions with one another, and their reflections on their own learning. We shared the results of the inventory and the open-ended survey with the adult learners and elicited their feedback.

The Rossman Adult Learning Inventory Based on the results from the Rossman inventory, we found that EDAD students have relatively little knowledge of any of the four dimensions of adult learning. Least awareness was reported for mental abilities and physiological factors. EDAD students scored highest on the psychological factors dimension. The ranking of these results paralleled those reported by Rossman. When we compared EDAD students with other graduate education students, the students enrolled in a Curriculum & Instruction course (N = 25) scored higher on every dimension than did the EDAD students. (See Table 1) These findings point out the need for administrators and students aspiring to become administrators to gain a better understanding of adult learning characteristics and theories. Ironically, those graduate students who do not profess an interest in adult learning, supervision, administration, etc. were more sensitive to adult learning characteristics.

The Open-ended Survey The open-ended survey covered the following topics: self-assessment of past and present learning, attitudes toward group learning, and educational objectives. The difference between how EDAD students viewed themselves in the past in contrast to how they view themselves today as learners

was striking. The majority of students saw themselves ranging from average to below average during their junior and senior high school years. Almost unanimously, EDAD students saw themselves currently as "over-achievers," "late-bloomers", "self-directed," "highly motivated," "assertive," "self-confident," "aggressive," "intellectual," and as "enjoying learning." In response to the question "I think I learn best when," EDAD students were divided into three categories: those who are categorized as passive learners ("I go to class and listen"; "The material should be organized and structured"; "The information is illustrated"; "The instructions are laid out and clear regardless of the task"); those who are actively involved in their own learning through participation, sharing in groups, and self-motivation ("I can participate -- do the activity -- and connect learning to present practice"); and those who internalize as well as visualize situations unfolding in their minds.

In terms of working and sharing in groups, EDAD students' attitudes towards the idea of group work were more positive than their actual descriptions of working in groups. For example, words such as "good experience," "positive," "cooperative," "rewarding," "terrific," "valuable," "satisfying," and "important," characterize how they think working in groups will be. In contrast, their work within the groups produced comments such as, "limited but OK," "rather anxiety producing," and "uncomfortable." Nevertheless, most of the comments viewed group sharing as "very helpful," "collegial," "relevant," "meaningful,"

and "beneficial."

Not all groups went about their tasks in the same way; some groups emphasized informal social interaction (i.e., "chit-chatting," and "introducing ourselves." Other groups were more task-oriented from the very beginning. They reviewed and clarified the assignment, tried to determine the most efficient method of accomplishing the task, made plans for future library sessions, and discussed how to "split up" (or copy) articles. When the EDAD students were asked how they chose other students to work with, they responded, "I wanted to work with middle school people;" "I chose friends that I had worked with in the past" or who "were in a previous class with me;" "I thought it was important to work with people I thought I could respect. Although most people were strangers, I didn't really care what group evolved because I know I can learn something valuable from everyone in the class;" "I chose a friend, a neighbor in class, and two other people who looked lonely." Clearly, the purposes of group learning varied considerably among the EDAD students such that ideal, social, and cooperative concepts formed a separate basis from the inefficient, and sometimes stressful feelings of actually working within groups.

When EDAD students were asked about their specific and general goals for their continuing education, their responses indicated that they entered the classroom with learning objectives already in mind. For most of them, the research and knowledge to be gained in this course had to be practical and

functional. They wanted to use information obtained here "to revise policies" and to make them "feel more comfortable in handling personnel decisions." Following up on the course syllabus, we asked students to describe "a real graduate school experience." [We asked this question again during the last class session of the semester in order to see whether in the students' minds we had accomplished that objective.] No one response can speak for all of the students' responses, but what they had in common was the desire to grow professionally, discover new talents, and build on their previous experiences. Only one student injected a key adult limitation to having "a real graduate school experience" when she wrote, "[It] allows me to gain knowledge, while realizing the fact that I have a life.'" In general, their comments were full of the hope of experiencing new knowledge -- how different from graduate students' retrospective analysis of their own previous experiences in graduate school. After all of their negative experiences, we found that they still want what we ourselves are striving to offer. Even if the EDAD students' responses were mirror reflections of our own rhetoric, the fact that we could talk about graduate school experiences devoid of the cynicism which surrounds most discussions is noteworthy.

The Observations of "Adult Watching" Since the doctoral student was enrolled in EDAD 6820 as part of her certification program, she attended every class session held during the summer semester. Although the class was scheduled to meet twice a week

for seven weeks, the professor allowed the students to determine when they needed group/library time; four class meetings were set aside for group time, but each group had the option of deciding exactly when and how they would work.

At the beginning of each class session, the professor introduced a topic from the core readings (e.g., philosophy, supply, demand, and attitudes; hiring; mentoring; coaching; competency; sexual harassment; assessments), which he referred to as "think pieces." Generally, the professor started the dialogue, but he seldom had to elicit discussion. The majority of the students participated willingly and politely in the discussions. Only one or two of the students remained "silent unless called upon" for the whole semester. Some of the students seemed to "get on soap boxes," and occasionally they monopolized the discussions. Most of the students referred to one another by first names; a few of them referred to the professor by his first name as well. The atmosphere was usually relaxed, but several sessions resulted in heated debates (e.g., the class meeting that discussed gender issues and sexual harassment) and hurt feelings (e.g., the role playing session about hiring a teacher for an inner city school). Sometimes the professor listed his class agenda on the board, but he didn't always follow it. In retrospect he said, "This is a teacher's prerogative. Sometimes we as teachers must grab the 'teachable moment' and forget about our own agendas." On July 1, the professor did just that.

He started the dialogue by sharing his reflections on the

statewide accelerated schools retreat that he had just returned from. Then, the dialogue moved on to restructuring, effective schools, and professional development sites. After about thirty minutes of discussion on these topics, the professor moved to another item listed on his agenda: group work. It would be the last item from his agenda that would be discussed that day. As soon as he asked about the progress of their group work, the professor was bombarded with problems. The students shouted out their complaints, which included broken or paperless copier machines in the library, trouble finding articles since most people were looking for many of the same ones, and articles that seemed to overlap topics.

What the professor knew at this point in the semester was that all of the groups were functioning -- in their own ways. Having gone to the library to observe the first scheduled group meeting, we were aware of how most of the groups had divided their work. One group had agreed to search for articles on the same topic and then to meet later to exchange them. Another group had divided up topics with the intent of later exchanging the articles. The third group had also divided the topics, but each member was responsible for reading and analyzing articles related to his or her topic. One group had decided to meet at a different time because they had had trouble locating and copying articles.

The professor also knew that what had not yet taken place in the course was the sharing of current information of

administration of school personnel across groups. On a number of prior occasions, he had asked if this was taking place, and when it became clear to him that it was not, he decided to raise the issue in front of the entire class: "Is every group making some progress? Is there any cross sharing? What I'm hearing is that many of you are not working at your most efficient level."

A heated discussion ensued, and students started looking to the professor for answers, information, structure. His response, however, was, "It's not my problem." Students frowned, and some appeared to be extremely angry. He offered the class the time to do their own problem solving. "Let me ask for a volunteer to facilitate the discussion and to help the class come up with a decision." A few members of the class suggested the highest ranking student -- a middle school principal because "she has experience." However, she declined, "I've already done this. Maybe somebody else would like to do this." Another student who had recently been appointed as assistant principal in a private school, volunteered to be the facilitator.

She began by restating what had been mentioned by the class as possible solutions: each student could copy X numbers of articles; students could share their summaries; the class could divide all of the topics and each group could research a separate topic; the class could make a library of the articles that people had already located. One student asked her to define the problem. Before she could respond, however, other students shouted at her. Most of the students were angry, rude, and

uncooperative. Many spoke at the same time. Some mouthed, "I am so frustrated." One student near me mumbled that the volunteer needed to be "more assertive and directive." Several times the volunteer tried to pose a solution, but she was invariably interrupted by those who disagreed with her. Some of the same suggestion were repeatedly given. Several students insisted that all that was needed were copies. One student commented, "It seems to me that some groups just don't want to share." Others mumbled and nodded in agreement. At one point the volunteer facilitator became irritated. She said, "We're supposed to be working in cooperative groups and collaborating, but I want everyone to listen so I won't have to say it over again." When she is interrupted and begins to repeat herself, a couple of students laugh. She turned to them and said, "That's rude, but that's OK." The tension became extremely high and someone recommended, "I make a motion we take a ten minute break." At several points during the discussion, the facilitator and other students turned to the professor. One student demanded that he as the teacher should be handling this. His response was, "I will go along with your decisions, but I will not settle this issue for you." This seemed to frustrate some students even more. After about an hour of arguing back and forth, the students -- some very reluctantly -- came to an agreement. Each group created a list of articles that they had copied. One student taped lists of the topic categories on the wall, and students who wanted to get articles signed their names below

specific titles.

At break the professor met privately with about six of the students. He attempted to give them private, constructive criticism about their behavior. In some instances the students became confrontational and emotional when he held up to them their aspirations to become future leaders. When break was over, the professor addressed the class, "I look at my role at this university to work with people who want to be in leadership roles. I try to put people into real leadership roles, but I also come here as a teacher with an agenda. Group problems seemed to be more of an issue today than my agenda. I couldn't facilitate the group problems. I repeat, 'It's not my problem;' mine were on the board. This was a real discussion -- a coming to a consensus and problem-solving...like a faculty meeting. Isn't that what we're here for? We have to remember our purposes -- our goals, and we have to keep asking ourselves what we're wanting to learn." Class ended and the professor and I discussed what we had witnessed. We had gone from a contrived problem to telling the students it was their problem and then taking it to real life. He had grasped the "teachable moment" as an opportunity to do some personal teaching.

Identifying the Learning Themes Individually, the professor and doctoral student analyzed the field notes collected during "adult watching" using the procedures described by Spradley (1979). We each examined the data looking for patterns or themes; he used copies of the field notes while I used the

originals. We met periodically to share what we were discovering through the data. While listening together to the eighty minute audiotape of the last class meeting, we individually transcribed the students' reflections. Once again we looked for patterns. We visited and revisited our data many times; we dialogued frequently about what we were seeing and hearing; and, eventually, we identified four recurring themes: learning processes, group processes, adult home and school life, and graduate school experiences. Learning processes related to the amount of information and the complexity of organizing and understanding the material. The personnel functions served as discrete, manageable categories; at the same time, the final product called for a synthesis in terms of a complete manual. Learning took place in writing about the information and reflecting over a time frame [for some that was the entire semester; for others it was "all of a sudden."] Many individuals started with what they knew best or from their previous experiences and related the task to their own school contexts.

Group processes involved sharing in formal group meetings during class time or in the library or informally over the telephone; in some cases, over time, the sharing evolved into trusting. It was not necessarily a smooth journey as friction occurred at the beginning, middle, or the end. Part of the friction was caused by the competitiveness among the students ["That group just doesn't want to share because we haven't done as much as they have. What could we offer them?"] Group process

issues emerged on two levels: intragroup and intergroup. The latter was more problematic, but less germane to completing the assignment.

Personal and family issues were close to the surface. There was sadness (i.e., one student experienced the death of a close relative) as well celebrations (i.e., two students were married during the semester; one shared her wedding album in class). "Busyness" was always a constant factor: other courses, comprehensive exams, professional conferences.

As a "real graduate school experience," the course had current research content and involved learning from others. It provided an integration between current research theories and actual practice. Although some students had reported feeling uncomfortable at various stages of the semester, most of them described the overall experience as "rewarding" and "thought provoking." Many of the activities were applicable to real life settings (i.e., facilitating a heated discussion; role playing hiring). The finished product, the "personal" personnel manual, required synthesis and tailoring to individual needs. One student told the professor, "After awhile, I started putting in things for me not for you. I knew I would be using this manual in the future."

The Epilogue Over half of the adult learners volunteered to participate in follow-up interviews after the semester course was over. We selected six students in the class who had volunteered to speak with us by phone or in person. The purpose of the

interview was to find out whether EDAD students (1) after writing a "personal" personnel manual had seized the opportunity to use the information acquired in the course [test the variables of self-directness, relevancy of content, and the immediate use of content]; (2) had come to value social group learning any more than they had prior to the course [test the variables on social versus individual learning]; and (3) had reflected on the learning experience, and if so, what were their reflections [test the variable of reflection on content].

Students found the course current, practical, "unlike other courses," and useful even in nonadministrative settings [e.g., teacher lounge discussions; in mentoring a new teacher]. In fact, for many the idea of personnel functions [hiring and firing] are not part of many public school administrators' lives and, therefore, the course was for them a "hard sell." The "big thing" was that they came out with a product that they could use. One student who had been appointed as a high school principal during the summer confessed, "The first thing we did was the Board put committees together. I was placed on the committee that is writing a policy manual. I felt so good. Even being new, I still have something to contribute. I have used a lot of the information, the handouts, the articles, my manual."

Students learned from each other; however, not without frustration over how to share information. For most, it was a matter of having a mass of information and not knowing exactly how to organize it. Some students argued to share limited number

of articles [e.g., "Why don't we each xerox two good articles and give them to everyone"]; others moved out on their own to find information to fit their own particular needs. Two roles seemed to differentiate the roles played by the group structure. In one setting, the group aim was to share research information primarily by xeroxing articles. Here, the groups acted as a medium of information exchange. In another setting, the group process was not limited to information gathering; rather the group provided a means of support through discussions of the process of how to complete the paper. In every instance, however, members went their own ways, all with some degree of anxiety about how to put the "personal" personnel manual together. It would appear that the latter strategy of support created more security in the individual students than did the information-gathering strategy.

The groups had a personal effect on others: self-analysis. It afforded them an inside look at their own personality and that of others in terms of leadership behaviors ("A lot is internal; I've learned to back up a little bit.") They had to deal with the outside lives of individual members (e.g., two marriages, preplanned family vacation, death in the family, returning to graduate school after 15 years).

The open-ended nature of the personnel manual contributed to the anxiety, which was, for the most part, self-inflicted. While the open-endedness permitted students to do work at their own pace, EDAD students, like most college educated adults, have been

conditioned to have teachers give work assignments with clear specification. In this course the specifications were there (e.g., Course Syllabus, p. 2), but they were never discussed formally in class. The lack of structure was a problem for some; for others, lack of structure is their structure ("It fit into my life perfectly").

Conclusions

By placing adult learning themes at the center of our planning and instructional activities in teaching educational administration, we created environments in which EDAD students gave voice to the ideals of learning, growing, and sharing. Bringing a positive, "real life" learning experience to aspiring administrators who hope to lead educational institutions is of critical importance. If they do not experience the joy in their own adult learning, it is not possible for them to create learning environments for teachers and staffs. Thus, through adult education, the educational administration professor is linked to revitalizing learning going on in schools.

Traditionally, EDAD program experiences have not received positive evaluations from school personnel in terms of interest, excitement, or relevance. Focusing on content alone has not been sufficient to change the negative assessments. What should stand out from this study is that before we really did anything in terms of learning activities, we talked about adult learning in terms of a "real graduate school" experience, and EDAD students responded, in turn, idealistically about group work and building

social learning communities, at least at the discourse level. It was the necessary first step in achieving students' learning ideals and should not be dismissed as cynical feedback. In fact, the end of semester feedback activities all attested to the continuation of positive feelings for this learning experience.

Not every student reached the same point at the end of the course. All those who had large life experiences [e.g., RIF, marriage, vacation plans, death in the family] during the semester put the course in perspective and did what they believed they could with their manuals under the circumstances. Only one of these students earned an "A" in the course. There were another group of students who did not internalize the usefulness of either the information gathering or the final product. Their manuals were basically objective descriptions of the research in each of the operationalized personnel functions. They, too, did not earn "A" grades. The largest group of students, by the end, handed in personnel manuals that were truly "personal," reflecting their own views on hiring, inducting, developing, and evaluating teachers within their specific contexts. What they wrote was useful for them, not us, and they earned "A" grades. Because we were able in our feedback session to talk about adult lives and adult learning, the grading processes, always painful, were made less so by the students' response that we had been fair.

Finally, the issue of structure still needs to be explored further. The course provided students with a structure of

gathering information [i.e., an ERIC search] and a structure for presenting the information sequentially [i.e., from hiring to firing]. What we didn't provide was a structure for how to organize the material [except for group sharing] or of what a "personal" personnel manual looks like. Rather, it was the adult learning processes of coping with too much information, making sense of the information, and in interpreting a relevant format which made the course real and challenging.

Ending This Episode of Our Story

The last class meeting was an emotional one for the doctoral student.

> I get teary-eyed even now as I struggle with the conclusion of this paper. Even though we were still going to conduct follow-up interviews and write an epilogue, this episode in our hopefully never-ending story of adult learning was drawing to a close. In addition, this class meeting was the last formal class of my doctoral program, and I sat taking her field notes with a lump in her throat. Fortunately, I had brought a tape recorder to class, and none of the adult learners objected to my audiotaping the session. In fact, several adult learners said, "I want this to be on the tape." They had discovered that they were a part of the research study, and it was indeed "our study." They had also discovered that they had voices and information that they wanted to share.

The professor described their manuals as "outstanding." He explained that they seemed to fall into three categories: (1) the old paradigm of textbook knowledge and central office responsibility; (2) knowledge and comprehension of new conceptions of personnel; and (3) analysis and synthesis of material and reflective practice. "I never really gave you the structure...This is a manual. I'm real pleased that you people

created your own structure. I now have new models."

In talking about how they had arrived from "there to here," students elaborated on their reading, going into the library stacks and finding articles, meeting in groups, talking on the telephone, and dialoguing in class. For most of them, however, the writing of the manual appeared to be an activity done alone. "I got lots of information from my group, but because of the "personal" nature of the manual, when it came time to actually put the manual together, I had to do it alone." When the professor said it was beginning to sound as though the "idea of cohesion in the groups [had] broke[n] down at the very end of the course," most of the students emphatically disagreed. "The educational group process never broke down. [We're] still sharing ideas. Even though I was home alone working I still spoke with members in my group. I surprised myself because I never thought I would come to trust the 'wacky' people in my group in such a short time." "I learned so much from my classmates than in any other [class] rather than from the instructor, not that I didn't but I learned a whole lot."

One of the students who had been silent for most of the semester said, "[This course] helped me move into research -- find articles, think about 'em, and apply it to your (sic) situation. I've already decided something different I'm gonna do when I go back -- in the situation as it is." She paused briefly and then continued, " In some way it makes you change." Isn't that what we as adults learning (and teaching) in educational

administration programs are all about? We end this episode the same way that we began -- with the adult learners.

Appendix 1

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY

Directions: Complete the following with as many words or sentences that you feel are necessary.

1. I would describe myself as a student in junior high/high school as one who

2. Now, I would describe myself as

3. I think I learn best when

4. When I read the course syllabus, I felt

5. I thought the individual sharing during the first two class meetings was

6. When I was told to choose the people that I wanted to work with, I

7. After forming our group, we began by

8. I think working in my group will be

9. My description of "a real graduate school experience" is one that

10. My goal as a student in this course is to

Appendix 2

Follow-up Interview Protocol

Tell me how you feel about your experiences in the personnel class this summer.

Specific Probes (if necessary):

Have you thought about it at all? [reflection] [if so, on what? how? etc.]

Have you used any of the information you collected from the course at your school? [relevancy, immediacy]
[if so, in what ways? how often? if not, why not?]

How did you feel about working so much of the course in a group setting? [social learning vs self-directedness]
[probe for pros and cons]

Both students and the professor said at various times that not having a model of what a personal personnel handbook to show the class was a weakness in the course. Do you still feel that? Why? [need for structure]

Were there any other problems with the structure of the course?

How did this class compare with your other administration certification courses? [treating students as adults, active learning] [try to get examples from other courses not taught by this professor]

How did you balance the course with your other responsibilities during the summer? [responsible adults]

Table 1

A Comparison of Graduate Students
using the Rossman Adult Learning Inventory

	EDAD (N = 18)	EDCI (N = 25)
TOTAL SCORE (# 1-44)		
M	32.610	35.167
SD	3.346	3.510
ORIENT. TO LRNG (# 1-11)		
M	8.720	9.542
SD	1.074	1.250
MENTAL ABILITIES (# 12-22)		
M	7.500	8.125
SD	1.581	1.361
PHYSIO. FAC (# 23-33)		
M	7.556	7.958
SD	1.653	1.459
PSYCHO. FAC (# 34-44)		
M	8.833	9.583
SD	1.425	1.176

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